

Filipino Migrant Women Becoming Active : Empowerment Taking Place in Kawasaki

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I . Introduction

1. *Object of the Study*

The main object of my study is to share how Filipino migrant women who are victims of domestic violence are empowering themselves, in a Japanese context where minority groups, especially women and migrants, are viewed through a racist lens as always being at fault, inadequate, undependable or incapable.

When I started to plan a study about the empowerment of abused Filipino migrant women, I was not fully conscious of the word 'racist' to be used as a reality indicative of the context where the empowerment of the Filipino migrant women abused by their Japanese partners evolved. It was when I reflected on my 16 years' stay in Japan accompanying migrants, particularly women and children and when we, with five women participants in this study described in detail and analyzed our experiences together during the eight meetings, that we clearly recognized the de-empowering and death-dealing experiences in Japan as having to do with racism. Kinukawa Hisako, a Japanese woman theologian, who

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through her book *Women and Jesus and Mark, A Japanese Feminist Perspective*, helped us to understand this reality. She mentioned that racism is rooted in patriarchy¹ as manifested in the Emperor system that is used as the model of relationships in the family as well as in society.

Japanese people in general and intimate partners of Filipino migrant women in particular, are not conscious that what they are doing is an aspect of racial discrimination. For them it is a natural thing to impose their own way onto non-Japanese people, especially onto migrants because doing it could also bring what they perceive as good life, peace and harmony in the community. In my study, I came to understand that this is the general position of people who belong to a racist or imperialist state. Graham Turner² describes for example the position of the Americans toward the Iraqi War as a combination of “innocence and arrogance”. According to him, “for most Americans, it is their genuine feeling to bring goodness to

¹ Patriarchy in Japan, is highlighted by emperor worship, and was forced upon the people as the principle of national unity, of legitimizing all sorts of unscrupulous invasion and of supporting paternal lineage. It penetrated deeply not only into the political and social life but into each family's life (Hisako Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective*, New York, Orbis Book, 1994)

² Graham Turner of the Daily Telegraph in Britain spent five weeks traveling across the United States, talking to the members of administration, residents of great universities, military commanders, chief executive officers of giant corporations and bank—and a host of ordinary citizens (Printed in the book “Understanding the Iraqi Crisis”, published by the Office for Human Development (OHD) of the Federation of Asian Bishop's Conference (FABC), 2003).

everybody, that they are ready to pay the highest price to bring people's freedom and to make the world a safer place". Also, Maria Elena Gonzales³, a Mexican-American who lives in the US identified the mindset of the majority and the minority that block multiculturalism. To her the majority believes that those with a different cultural heritage or a different language are a problem ; and for the majority, unity equals uniformity. The minority on the other hand, believes that the way of the dominant group is the best way, accepts self-depreciation and believes that the only safe place is "among us." I believe a racist attitude, which still predominates Japanese society, is a block to multiculturalism.

From the point of the racist relationship that the abused Filipino migrant women experienced from their intimate partners, we would like to understand in this study how the abused Filipino migrant women are able to reverse their situation of victimization to empowerment. At the same time, we would like to understand empowerment from the point of view of the abused Filipino migrant women themselves. We hope that all the processes in this study would be an empowering experience for the women in particular, and for KALAKASAN as a support group, in general.

2. Methodology

We used 'feminist participatory action research' as our methodology

³ Maria Elena Gonzales, RCM, in her talk "Cultural Diversity : Blessings or Curse?" given to the Major Religious Superior in the US, 2002.

to “open a space for migrant women speech.” We conducted interviews and held focused group discussions as methods of our sharing and understanding empowerment. We focused on the life stories of the abused Filipino migrant women participants. Through the feminist participatory action research we tried to understand the subordination and oppression of abused Filipino migrant women with a woman’s viewpoint. By doing this, we hoped that the women would be empowered to change their condition at the same time that we wanted to build an egalitarian, non-racist and gender-balanced society. As a process, I tried in this methodology to reduce the power gap between the women participants and me by emphasizing that this study ‘is our study.’ Therefore, all of us are learners based on our experiences. It bonded us and gave us the opportunity to deepen the trust and solidarity and to identify links where all of us could benefit from this study even with our existing differences. True to what Reinharz⁴ says, ‘there is no one way of doing things, for women have not one but many voices.’ Our methodology, though it was feminist participatory action research has its own uniqueness. Therefore, it could not be subsumed into just one feminist methodology.

II . Overview of Filipino Women Migration to Japan

Understanding the origin as well as the process of the Filipino

⁴ Reinharz, S., *Feminist Method in Doing Social Research*, p.4

women migration and the condition of the socio-political and cultural context they have entered into will add to the background of why many of them experienced abuse and exploitation in Japan.

1. Economic Globalization and Migration of Filipino Women

Migration of Filipino women to Japan emerged and developed within the Philippine government's effort to globalize the Philippine economy as the country's development strategy. Economic globalization however, instead of generating food and social security for the poor has made the Filipino people poorer¹. As a consequence, massive numbers of Filipinos seek better opportunities abroad. Currently, more than 8 million Filipinos are estimated to be in 182 countries all over the world.

Filipino women migration to Japan according to Yolanda Tsuda², started after the Philippine government ratified in 1973 the Philippine-Japan Treaty of Amity Commerce and Navigation that abolished the restrictions on travel and trade. Within one year Japanese investment in the Philippines expanded by 400%. Likewise, it paved the way to sex tours where groups of Japanese men usually in company-funded vacations came to the country to

¹ Sr. Mary John Mananzan, a Benedictine Missionary Sister who is the Executive Director of St. Scholastica College Institute of Women Studies and the National Chairperson of GABRIELA, the widest coalition of women's organization in the Philippines.

² Yolanda Tsuda, *Omote to Ura: Japan Views Trafficking*, a paper presented in the Expert Meeting on International Trafficking, sponsored by Asian Women's Fund, Tokyo, Japan, November 25-27, 2003.

buy sex. Sex tours were stopped through the opposition of religious and non-governmental organizations but the exploitation of Filipino women continued when instead of Japanese men going to the Philippines, Filipino women in the 80s were brought to Japan to work in the sex industry.

There was also the great demand especially in the rural areas for Filipino wives in the latter part of the 80s. Since that time until today this demand has remained not only in the rural areas but also in the main cities wherein Japanese men prefer Filipino wives. Filipino women in most cases, see this as an opportunity for them to stay and work in Japan. Filipino women not only provide sexual or reproductive services to Japanese society. Many of them provide productive services as workers in factories, hotels and restaurants and soon as caregivers. For Filipino people migration becomes the only hope to improve their impoverished lives. Negative images of the plight of migrant women in Japan cannot discourage Filipino women from coming, even after having traumatic personal experiences. With a sense of boldness, the women face all the risks, bringing with them their faith in God, whom they believe as a merciful protector in times of difficulty and danger.

The desire of Filipinos to go abroad mainly because of the economic situation in the Philippines is being taken by the Philippine government as being beyond their control where the only thing that they can do is to facilitate the migrants' movement. However, facts would show that having made Filipino migration as a major industry, the Philippine government has been engaged in

its intensive promotion and marketing of workers and at present aims to compete, to be the first class world supplier of human labor³ by producing workers as demanded by foreign markets. In this era of heightened economic globalization where Filipino workers especially women are traded for profit and for the sake of the country's development, oftentimes these women are not given assurance of their dignity and the protection of their rights and welfare.

2. Understanding the Condition of Filipino Migrant Women in Japan

In this paper I will describe in brief, three groups of Filipino women in Japan. First, the plight of Filipino women entertainers in as much as they comprise the largest number of deployed women workers to Japan, i.e. more than 80,000 for the past two years. In most cases, it is at the entertainers' workplaces that they meet their Japanese partners. Second, the condition of the Filipino wives of Japanese with an approximate total of 70,000 to 80,000 (calculated from combining the number of mixed marriages between 1992 and 2002. This figure excludes common-law couples.) And third, the undocumented women living with or separated from their Japanese partners.

Entertainers come with a label of professional "Overseas Performing Artists". The label in itself hides exploitation and

³ Patricia A. Sto. Tomas, "Overseas Filipino Workers in the National Development Agenda : The Government's Perspective", paper presented in the Expert and Media Forum, Ateneo de Manila University, 2003.

violations by their promoters or agents and employers. And, though women in this category of work are labeled as professionals, their work is not regarded as work in Japan. This deprives them of their right to file complaints when abuses and violation of their rights in the workplace occur. Because of these violations and the tightening immigration policy that re-victimize the women more than their violators, many of the women are overstaying their visa⁴. Their concerns are not getting much attention due probably to the low regard attributed to women in this kind of work, as is true with Japanese women. Just as Japanese women in this occupation are discriminated against, migrant women in this occupation find themselves in a double discrimination.

Most of the marriages taking place between Filipino women and Japanese men are characterized as marriages of convenience. The woman aims to stay and work in Japan while the man expects an obedient, dutiful wife. It is truly difficult for couples entering marriages in this way to sustain their relationship. The difference in expectations can become complicated because of the difference in language, values and lifestyles. Usually the pressure is put on the wife to adapt to the language, values and lifestyles of the husband that could further develop into serious conflict, to domestic violence and divorce. These marriages have been going on for one and a half

⁴ Mizuho Matsuda, Japan. An Assessment of the International Labour Migration Situation, The case of female labour migrants, GENPROM Working paper No. 5, Series on Women and Migration, Gender Promotion Programme, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2002.

decades. A step to reduce the vulnerability of Filipino women to violence and trafficking has not been given serious attention. It is the right time to look at the particular context of the partnership in general and the condition of migrant women in particular.

The undocumented Filipino women living or separated from their Japanese partners including their children are on the margins in terms of life protection and human development. Being undocumented they are in constant fear of being arrested and deported. In most cases, they give birth to more children and when the father fails to recognize them as his children before their birth, the children also become undocumented. After the passage of the DV Law, they can be protected with a two-weeks stay in a shelter when abused by their partners. The exclusion from benefits like livelihood assistance compels abused undocumented women to go back to their abusive Japanese partners many times. Shelters and other supporters may even advise the woman to go back to her country for lack of available public support even though the woman has children of Japanese fathers. Lacking support affects not only the woman but also the children.

Again, migration of women to Japan took place within the globalization effort of the government. It will continue because of the worsening poverty caused mainly by economic globalization and the demand for women in Japan. As migrants in Japan Filipino women face violations of their rights and dignity, exploited by their promoters and employers and oppressed by their husbands or partners because of their class, gender, race and nationality.

III. Empowerment Process : Review of Women Stories

To the five Filipino migrant women participants, “empowerment is equal to anger.” It moves them to act against the abuses and injustices that they experienced from their intimate partners and from the system that oppressed them as women and migrants. Their claim for justice can be traced to their early life experiences in the Philippines, which continued and intensified in Japan by the fact that they are Non-Japanese migrants. In their stories the participants recalled how their anger was channeled into a constructive anger through their own inner strength and the intervention and support of concerned groups. With the change in their perspective, resulting in valuing who they are as persons and women, they commit to continue working for a just and peaceful community. Except Donna who offered to use her real name the other four women participants are called by different names.

1. *Personal background and Profile of Women Participants*

Five Filipino women abused by their intimate Japanese partners participated in this study. They represent the three major islands in the Philippines. Two came from Luzon, another two from the Visayas and one from Mindanao.

1.1 *Participants Early Recollection (Philippines)*

The family size of the women participants, range from having four to twelve sisters and brothers including themselves. Except Anna whose parents were secure in their job, the other four women

participants recalled their family's struggle to make a living when they were growing up. As young as six years old they helped with the house chores and during elementary school started to add to the family's income by selling vegetables and fruits and helping in the farm. Ester mentioned that she felt ashamed of the cracks in their house and felt inferior to children of the same age because she did not have good clothing. As a result she had a low level of self-confidence, had poor performance in school and tended not to associate with others in their neighborhood. The four women participants mentioned that because of their economic situation, relatives who were better off economically looked down upon them.

As to educational background, Anna wanted to finish her course in Bachelor of Arts but stopped after she fell in love with her former Japanese husband when she was in her 2nd year of college. Belen and Celia were high school graduates. Belen finished with her parents' support while Celia financed her studies by vending vegetable and fruit. At the same time she financially supported her family as well at a time when reconciliation between her parents was impossible. Donna left high school, went to neighboring towns, and eventually to Manila when she was 13 years. She rebelled against her father who used to abuse her mother and herself, and started to be self-supporting. Ester through the support of an uncle was able to pursue her education, finished a midwifery course and successfully passed the midwifery board exam. This experience made Ester regained her self-confidence.

Donna recalled her employer in the Philippines attempting to

rape her. Out of her desire to escape, she accepted to live with a man who became the father of her two Filipino daughters. The same happened with Celia. Wanting to have someone who could help them economically, she agreed to have relationships with someone who became the father of her two sons and daughter in the Philippines. With Donna, it was a painful and frustrating experienced. Her partner often abused her and his family had a low regard for her.

1.2. Brief Life Recollection About Japan: First Entrance, With Intimate Relation and Time of Study

All the women participants first came to Japan when they were in their early 20s. Three women entered with a spouse visa while two worked first in the snack bar where they met their Japanese husbands. Belen entered with an entertainer visa while Donna entered Japan three times with a tourist visa before she met and decided to marry her first Japanese husband. Both mentioned being tired of undergoing the process of entrance into Japan many times and the fear of not having another chance to work in Japan as main reasons for their decision to marry. Belen added the pressure in her work place and her being pregnant at that time that forced her to live with her present Japanese partner.

Only Anna mentioned love as a reason for her marriage. Celia, who met her former Japanese husband in the Philippines through a friend, agreed to the marriage proposal because she wanted to have a normal family within a church marriage. She learned to love her

husband in the course of their living together. The same thing with Ester who did not have a normal courtship since her marriage with her former husband was facilitated by a marriage agency. She learned to love her husband when they began living together and had children.

At the time of this study only Belen lived with her partner. All the other four women participants are divorced but live with their Japanese children, giving them the right to stay in Japan as nurturers of children with Japanese fathers. Belen, Celia and Donna have children in the Philippines from their Filipino partners. Belen though she wanted to send financial support to her son in the Philippines could not, because of economic hardships due to raising five undocumented children in Japan. Celia feels the responsibility of sending support to her three children. She receives livelihood assistance but she also works hard in Touhatsu Food Co. so that she can send money to her children from her own efforts.

2. Domestic Violence (DV) Within the Context of International Migration—Abuse and Control Against Gender, Class and Race

Migrant women as non-Japanese, suffer abuses not only because they are women and economically dependent on their partners but from abuses that emerge from their partners' prejudices. When these prejudices give rise to abuses stemming from the abusers' power, this turns into racial discrimination. With the recollection of the types of intimate partners' abuse that were experienced by Anna, Belen, Celia, Donna and Ester we were able to see concretely

how their partners made use of the women's condition as non-Japanese to control, weaken and destroy their self-esteem and worth.

Foremost of the incidences that the participants mentioned were : the threats regarding non-extension of visa ; negation of child custody or the right to see the child that significantly weakened the resolve of the migrant women to act against the violence ; denial of her right to know her husband's sources of income and amount of salary because the woman would not comprehend the husband's explanation ; and, negatively being critical of the Filipino ways of thinking and doing things. For example, prohibition to use the Tagalog language ; being highly critical of the way the wife does the home chores, cares and disciplines the children and branding Filipinos as "no good, liars, poor." The abuses suffered by the women participants from their Japanese partners become institutionalized when the state, local communities, public institutions and other agencies perpetuate and reinforce the system of violence against migrant women.

Many believe that it would be easier for migrant women to return to their home country to avoid all these abuses but Filipino migrant women see Japan as a better prospect of improving their economic situation, and more and more they are convinced that Japan is a better place for raising and educating their children. Migration in the last three decades has been described as economically driven (Asian Migrant Yearbook 2000)¹. With the present economic situation of the Philippines, it is most likely that more Filipino

women will marry Japanese men to be able to come and stay in Japan.

3. Anger Energizes/Empowers Migrant Women to Act Against Violence

Donna without a second thought expressed that for her “empowerment was paralleled to anger.” Until now, for her, anger is the catalyst for her continued commitment to work for justice and peace. With the other four women participants, it was not a spontaneous identification of anger as their moving element. It was later in the sharing that they identified anger as a force keeping them struggling against the abuses of their partners, anger that had been suppressed and erupted enabling them to act for safety at the time when the abuse had reached beyond the capacity of each one to bear and cope.

For them anger could be constructive ; a message that change was demanded. At the same time it could be destructive when it damages relationships.

I will proceed with a brief description and analysis with the migrant women, of how anger in the different processes they had undergone propelled them to reach the stage of being involved in the work for a safe and just community, particularly for women and children. In doing this we referred to the article “The Healing Power

¹ “Reviewing Gains, Understanding Empowerment, Deepening Strategies (Highlights of the 6th Regional Conference on Migration)”, in Asian Migrant Yearbook 2000 : Migration Facts, Analysis and Issues in 1999, Reiko Harima, Rex Varona, Bien Molina Jr, Sajida Ally, Nurui Qoiriah ed., Asian Migrant Centre Ltd.

of Anger” authored by Carroll Saussy of Wesley Theological Seminary and Barbara J. Clarke of the American University², as a basis for deepening our understanding of women’s experience of anger, seen in the different phases or survival processes within their intimate relations, the decision to leave, and the rebuilding of the broken pieces of their lives.

3.1 Within an Intimate Relation

From the stories of the five Filipino women participants, we saw an unequal relation wherein the wives were treated with prejudice. The unequal relation bred anger, which the women dared to express. But when they were met with power and force by their Japanese spouse, they had no choice but to suppress their anger.

Intimate relationships started when the woman met the Japanese man in the workplace or when a friend or an agency facilitated the formation of a relationship. My experience as well as that of the women’s confirmed that Japanese men who met their wives in the workplace were sympathetic to the condition of the women. They had the intention of helping the women get out of their miseries. The problem was that they wanted to resolve the women’s unfortunate situation according to their terms, which, of course, was according to the Japanese way of doing things.

The main problem rested on the belief that what was the man’s and what was economically developed and what was Japanese

² Carroll Saussy and Barbara J. Clarke, “The Healing Power of Anger”, in Jeanne Stevenson Moessner ed. *Through the Eyes of Women : Insights for Pastoral Care*, Fortress Press Minneapolis, 1996.

lorded over everything else. The system of domination and subordination which we call patriarchy, based on one's race, class and gender pervaded the Japanese people's way of relating with one another. And, in the Japanese context, where the stage of development became comparable to the west, the same belief that had existed in the minds of the Japanese from time immemorial became even more magnified- namely, the attitude that says to the other, "ours is better than yours." This way of living became the natural way of dealing and relating with one's neighbors in the community; husband with wife; brothers and sisters³ within the family.

It was in the above context that the anger of the women participants evolved.

The different insecurities of the women related to their visa extension, financial support, living life alone, raising and educating their children and economic sustenance in case of divorce or abandonment, fear of a broken family, fear of children without a father were all considerations that made them suppress their anger.

When the women participants dared to express their anger, voice out their discomfort and discontentment and attempt to express their opinions and demands, they got in return demeaning categorizations that damaged their emotional, psychological and spiritual well-being; and or physical assaults that brought scars and impairment to their hearing and sight. The women participants

³ wife-husband, sister-brother do not imply that women intend to occupy the position of men but to highlight the need to create equal relationship.

in their recollections said that with their partners, they were always in the wrong, incapable and deserving of be reminded to change, to correct their ways of thinking and doing things. In the article, "Healing Power of Anger," Jean Miller was quoted as saying that, "*a dominant group never wants subordinates to express anger and uses its power to keep such expression down. The angry persons then see themselves as weak, unworthy, with neither right or cause to be angry.*" (p.108)⁴.

What led the women participants to continue to refocus into constructive endeavors was the life force within which they recognized as God. This constantly reminded and guided them to face their circumstances with courage. With their reclaimed anger, they tried to be more assertive, convinced that what they were doing was for the sake of their family and their children.

3.2 Decision to Break from the Abusive Relationships

Different incidences causing intense anger reversed the women's resolve to hope for a miracle to happen in their relationship with their husband. They made the women act with determination to escape their abusers, bring their children with them and look for a safe place where they could stay. Not only one attempt, but some of the women tried to end the abuse many times in moments of their rage.

The decision to end the abusive relationships happened when the

⁴ "The Healing Power of Anger", p.108.

women participants were in a state of intense anger. There was the possibility to go back to their partners, considering the pattern of their anger moving in a zigzag with the interplay of other emotions that left them again in a powerless state, but later when given sustained support, Anna, Celia, Donna and Ester could happily say that, “they had made the right decision.”

3.3 Re-creating the Broken Pieces

Starting to re-create their lives with their children could be doubly difficult outside the familiar environment of the family. All their beliefs about an ideal family based on their religious-cultural background, their internalized fears that were not clarified, all their uncertainties of the future without their husband’s support, all of these and other realities haunted and shook the resolution of the women to end the abusive relation even after leaving their partners and already taking refuge in a shelter or living with their children in their own apartments.

At the time of our sharing the women participants had identified their strengths, and named and owned them. They said that after leaving their partners they pursued every possible way to find life-giving strategies like finding support groups because they believe that they could not do it alone.

They came to realize that empowerment was not just an individual endeavor but achieved through relationships. They needed individuals or groups who could give them enough caring and respectful space to be themselves. It would be most helpful if

they would be helped to sort out and identify their anger repressed by dominant figures or groups. Anger which they themselves suppressed because they did not know well how to express it. Generally anger has been considered a problem. A person, especially a woman who is angry becomes a problem. Through the sharing of Donna, the women were helped to surface their anger. With Donna citing passages from the Bible to explain her anger the other women came to realize that anger could be God's anger if it is against oppression and abuse.

4. Collective Passion for Change

This subchapter will present the women's collective aspiration to work towards personal and societal transformation. The source of such aspirations, come from their anger, which they believed as God's anger against injustices. Experiencing themselves-in-relation with another that resulted in positive changes in their lives is the key to the movement towards collective actions. The movement can be laid out in three stages.

4.1 Participation and Change of Consciousness

"Nani mo dekinai" (incapable to do anything), *"itsumo dame"* (always not doing the right thing), *"okane bakari"* (thinks only about money)-these phrases and other demeaning categorizations fed to the Filipino women in time of her relation with her partner have been forced into and re-inforced within their consciousness, resulting in doubting their own capability.

From the telling of the women stories, we came to know that

when given the chance to participate and to take the lead in deciding best options for their lives, the abused Filipino women were able to reverse their consciousness of inability to empowerment. It is true that at the beginning, at the time of their escape the supporters took the lead to put them in a safe place. However, after the women had rested and recovered a certain degree of stability, which they acquired through their relations with the people supporting them, abused women should be given the chance to lead, that is to decide the best path for their lives and their children's. The women can best decide if they are given pertinent information and options to choose. The process also includes a non-judgmental way of clarifying with them their values based on their experiences, actions and decisions. Allowing the abused women to decide for themselves about the direction of their lives means allowing them to make mistakes. Then together, the abused women and the supporter both can learn from those experiences.

4.2 Co-Survivors Supporting One Another

From our experience we have learned that abused women who have undergone the process described above, in the spirit of a new consciousness emerging from their claim for a dignified life based on justice and equality, encourage other abused women not to lose hope, never give up, resist violence and injustices and work for the transformation of their own lives, their children and their communities. They do this in their own locality or community and

anywhere they go, especially when an abused Filipino woman happens to disclose her problem. They explain to them what domestic violence is and they provide the abused women with basic information on what to do and where to go. They give telephone numbers of shelters and usually that of KALAKASAN. Having gone through the same experience, they are able to make their points relevant to the needs of the other abused women.

4.3 Collective Action

A sense of sisterhood is evolving among the abused Filipino migrant women in KALAKASAN, an experience most profoundly felt in particular by the participants of this study. A sisterhood that has been generated from their interactions with one another, from the informal exchanges taking place outside and inside KALAKASAN.

To the five participants, telling their stories was an energizing experience. Ester remembered the circle “like her family” and the regular meaningful sharing has “made it easier for her to remember her past life, given her the chance to recollect even areas which she wanted to forget”. Donna said that, “things that were deeply buried inside were unearthed, shared and processed, resulting in deeper understanding of themselves-in-relation with others”. She added that, “those who did not previously have voices were able to share and disclose their stories because trust had been developed among them”. For her, “it was a beautiful experience to see co-survivors empowered in the process”. At the beginning the others were not so

expressive but she observed that, “as we met regularly, others become passionate in telling their stories and their strength came out”.

The group realized first of all the importance of identifying, owning and expressing their anger as key to their empowerment. By using the article “The Healing Power of Anger” we tried to understand anger more deeply and how to use anger positively⁵ as abused migrant women. Since skills in handling anger constructively need time and practice, the participants were most challenged to incorporate the need to understand their anger in their daily lives to avoid projecting their anger to others like their children thereby allowing the possibility of continuing the cycle of violence and disrespect to the least and vulnerable recipients of their anger.

Donna the first to be involved in the migrant work initially as a volunteer before the establishment of KALAKASAN and later as KALAKASAN full time staff member and one of its representative, expressed passionately that her anger is against the oppressive system, manifested in her experiences as woman and migrant in Japan. She expressed her commitment to really work for the transformation of the hearts of people and society with whatever power she has which she always says is the power from God. The other four participants having been involved in the activities related to migrants for the past 2 to 6 years expressed the same

⁵ “The Healing Power of Anger”, pp.116-120.

commitment to participate in the work for justice especially for migrant women and their children but not to the extent that Donna does because their children are now still small.

The five participants agreed to continue their sharing and wish to inform more women and the public about the situation of Filipino migrant women in Japan. They plan to expand the number of women to become aware of their situation. Regarding their identification of anger as empowerment, they plan to develop a program that will help Filipino migrant women reclaim their anger and use anger for the transformation of their lives and their community. Harrison was quoted saying in the same article that, "all serious human, moral activity, especially action for social justice, takes its bearings from the rising power of human anger" ⁶

IV. Organizational Intervention

The support of a group or organization helped the women reverse their situation from destructive to constructive anger and from inaction to collective action. Organizational interventions alone, according to the women participants could not transform their lives without their participation and determination to change.

During our sharing, we reflected on the organizational support extended to the abused Filipino migrant women. We recognized that actions of support for migrant women in Japan, is part of the

⁶ "The Healing Power of Anger", p.120.

overall movement to change the subordination of women, on the global, national, and local levels that helped transform their lives.

In particular, we focused on one support group accompanying migrant women-KALAKASAN Migrant Women Empowerment Center-because my direct involvement with the abused migrant women is taking place within this support group. I did a life review of KALAKASAN, its vision and program of activities. I mentioned then, institutional practices, which the women found de-empowering in both public and private support institutions. I also shared interventions the women in their reflections indicated were supportive of their empowerment.

Support for the empowerment of Filipino migrant women abused by their intimate partners is needed as seen from the testimonies of the women participants and from my own long experience as a missionary accompanying migrant women and as a staff member of KALAKASAN. The initiatives that our energies allow us to do at the moment for the empowerment of abused Filipino migrant women, is united with the global and local movements' initiatives for women. As a very local initiative, we believe that empowerment for the abused Filipino migrant women is possible when we provide enough space for them, so that they can regain or reclaim their inner strength, allowing them to discover their many potentials, their dignity and worth.

V. Conclusion: *Reorientation and Reconstruction Towards Forming Communities that are Life-giving, Healing and Empowering*

1. *Points of Realizations*

What have we learned from this study? First, we recognized that the abuses and oppression experienced in personal relationship with intimate partners by the Filipino migrant women participants in this study are abuses perpetuated because of their class, gender and race, which have their roots in a patriarchal system in society.

Second, we were able to identify that the gross violation of the rights of Filipino migrant women generates anger as their expressions of their claim for justice and their demand for equality and peace in their personal lives and in the society.

Third, we learned to respect women in their anger, listening to them in a non-judgmental compassionate way, so that they could externalize their anger, a road to empowerment.

Fourth, we learned that woman's resistance through anger is not enough to ensure empowerment. In our experience, we saw that there needs to be an affirming, empowering community where we can all be healed. An empowering community of both women and men, with compassion attempting to transform relationships, from being racist or patriarchal to ones that truly enhance life for all.

And, fifth, we affirmed that the feminist and participatory way of doing research is a process empowering abused Filipino migrant women.

2. Recommendations

Generally, we see the need to deconstruct hierarchies or patriarchal tendencies that produce and sustain systemic violence in society. We believe, this requires a conscious, honest, humble and passionate commitment by the majority to confront the issue of discrimination against race, gender, class, nationality or other segmentation that exclude or oppress other members in Japanese society, especially the minority, migrants, migrant women and their children. There is a need to be conscious of vulnerabilities, in terms of positions and powers, of domination and subordination, reflecting and challenging one's standpoint for the purpose of insuring that all voices are heard, that one's values and life preferences are processed and that honest, trustful, compassionate relationship in the community is restored and developed.

There is the general need to reorient individual and communities' values and actions across different relationships and structures, personal, grassroots, local or national. There must be a committed, conscious movement for the creation of communities that are life-giving, healing and empowering. Consciousness towards this end has to be propagated in all places by all, but the formation of communities wherein each member experiences warmth, healing and together weaving new stories of being truly human—this is the core of our life revival.

Particularly, we see the need to transform policies, programs and practices in the following areas as fundamental to constructing a just, racial, nationality inclusive and gender equal society in Japan.

2.1 Policy Change

- A change in Philippine government policy resulting in the Philippines being the world-class supplier of workers. This means that instead of prioritizing the production of workers according to the global needs and demands, it has to prioritize the welfare and well-being of its people, especially women who comprise the majority of workers deployed abroad.
- A policy or law in Japan related to the elimination of trafficking in women and children. With this is an urgent need to understand how trafficking of women is taking place in Japan guided with the existing international understanding of trafficking at the same time, being conscious of the possibility to find new patterns of trafficking that subject women to deception, abuse and continued exploitation.
- A different immigration policy to make the stay of foreign wives of Japanese in Japan not dependent on their husbands or on their children who have Japanese fathers. This is needed to reduce domestic violence against migrant women by their intimate Japanese partners. At the same time, we see the need to make an immigration policy that domestically abused migrant wives of Japanese must be exempted from having guarantors during their visa extension or application for a special residence to stay in Japan.
- A reform in the policy of medical and livelihood assistance, allowing overstaying migrant women with undocumented children of Japanese fathers to enjoy the same protection of life

and health, irrespective of nationality and visa status.

- A policy to insure immediate implementation of the amended DV law in the different prefectures and municipalities, paying attention to informing the general public about DV and monitoring public agencies given the responsibility to support the victims, especially sensitive to migrant women victims, in particular the undocumented migrant women fleeing and seeking protection.

2.2 Public and Private Institutions

For public and private institutions directly concerned with migrants and abused migrant women, we see the following needs,

- The Philippine Embassy must improve their support of abused Filipino migrant women and their children not only in providing documents but other support that ensure the morale and self-esteem of the Filipino women.
- Immigration offices must be more human and sensitive to the needs of abused migrant women. Important information and decisions must be explained in an understandable language and in a humane manner. Officials must be aware that to show dominance will only confuse and push the women to greater abuse and exploitation.
- Police need to be more sensitive to the plight of abused migrant women especially the undocumented during the time of the abuse. They have to live with the undocumented women's expectation for them, as officials who can provide safety for

them, rather than arresting or detaining them.

- The need for social workers and other workers in the ward offices which have the ability to work with anyone, across racial and other social divides, who have the consciousness of the differences among people, particularly between Japanese and non-Japanese rather than the pretense that people are the same and the needs are the same.
- The need for shelters to ensure that the abuses experienced by the migrant women from their intimate partners must not be repeated during their stay in the facility. Being the first place where abused women stay after fleeing from their abusive partners, shelters must provide physical safety as well as psycho-emotional security by treating abused women as persons capable of making choices if given the appropriate space.

2.3 KALAKASAN Migrant Women Empowerment Center

- Conduct a re-evaluation of its programs and practices by taking into account the stories of the women participants in this study.
- Develop the areas identified by the women participants as empowering, such as: providing a safe, unconditional, non-judgmental place to express themselves, and letting them make their choices regarding information, training and participation. KALAKASAN has to integrate them into other programs or activities or develop a program with the abused Filipino migrant women themselves, which could enhance their personal lives and the life of the community.

- Give priority to the formation of communities of abused Filipino migrant women, conscious that this process must provide a safe space for the women to reclaim their powers. It is here where the women would be able to describe, resist and reframe destructive tendencies and images about themselves dictated by patriarchy, and transform these into new life-giving, empowering stories of truth about themselves in order to lead to empowering communities. At the same time, there is the need to encourage communities to relate with other communities of women and men.
- It has to be aware of its own vulnerabilities to repeat many times over the victimization and oppression of abused migrant women. Nobody is exempt from the influence of dominant patriarchal structures. Therefore, there is the tendency either to put the self up and others down or put the self down and others up. There must be a conscious reflection and confrontation of each staff member's position and through dialogue and humility to reorient one's consciousness and practices to ways of empowering both, but especially the abused migrant women.
- In as much as the faith dimension of abused Filipino migrant women seems to be deeply embedded in their psyche as we heard in the sharing of their stories and as manifested in our interaction with one another, we see the need for KALAKASAN to explore further how our religious-cultural beliefs have contributed to the victimization and oppression of abused Filipino migrant women, as well as how these beliefs

contributed to their empowerment. And,

- Promote and develop “feminist participatory action research” as a way to empower people and migrant women.

2.4 FPAR Group

For the group composed of the five Filipino migrant women participant in this study and myself, we see the needs for our group to,

- Continue our sharing as a group. There is the commitment to nourish the gains we have achieved, especially the solidarity and sisterhood, the realizations gained from the reflection of our life stories and the feeling of release and liberation after we were able to express and participate in making the tapestry of our stories coherent and understandable among us. From understanding our stories, we want to create a counter story of abused Filipino migrant women, offering strategies that could better help them to resist future abuse and could give birth to just communities.
- Develop an alternative safe and creative space, where abused migrant women would be able to root out, identify, channel and express their anger constructively. For us, creation of this space is urgent, in as much as migrant women are oftentimes victims of injustices and violence that are personal and structural. Just by their own resistance without external support and an affirming community, abused migrant women can lead to destructive anger of resistance. Lastly,

- Reach out to other abused migrant women in particular and to the public in general. We see the need to inform and share our experiences to the abused women themselves to gain a broader solidarity. At the same time, we see the need to share our experiences with local and broader communities for we believe that we could only be well when all the other members of the community are well.

We are presenting our recommendations as resulting from the weaving of our life stories, going through victimization towards the empowering processes that are taking place while we are in Japan as migrants. In my position as a Catholic Filipino lay missionary, my orientation and ways of mission particularly in accompanying migrant women has been inspired by feminist and liberation writers and theologians. It is in being rooted in the concrete life experiences of people and in this study, the experiences of abused Filipino migrant women and their children, in their struggle for life that give meaning to the feminist and liberation theologies that have influenced me. We share and try to nurture this orientation in KALAKASAN, as other members are also emerging from the same consciousness. It is no wonder that the abused Filipino women in this study are slowly becoming oriented to what we believed from our own context, are life-giving and empowering, both on the personal and structural dimension of life.

We would like to resound the urgency to live the recommendations and the dreams of nurturing the life of the person and the community irrespective of their identities, as if they are

already present. It is in living our dreams for an empowering, egalitarian community now, seen more in our practices that will make it possible for the dream to become a reality.